

retusus by handydandynotebook

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Summary:

“Jesus. I’m an accomplice to your murderous axe rampage and we did drunk cooking together. That means something or other, Sue, I get it, but it definitely doesn’t mean you can crawl up my ass about every single little thing.”

What she did to Neil changes things. A lot of things. Maybe they can be open with each other in ways they couldn’t before. Neither of them have to navigate the other with Neil in mind because there’s no more Neil to navigate, and Billy acknowledges that. But he has no reason to tolerate her hovering. This much this fast is downright suffocating.

retusus

Author's Note:

part 6 ahjgkhfiueri. this is rly dumb and proolly boring now lmao. i have no excuse, i think i just like playing with multiple pov.

warning for slight bloody stuff and more brief stuff with billy n karen. it doesn't rly go anywhere, nor would i *ever* write anything where it did go somewhere.

edit 03-02-21, added the underage tag just in case. like, nothin rly happens, but still. ppl uncomfortable w that kinda thing, i respect.

edit 03-02-21, took off the underage tag upon realizing it proolly made it sound like susan n billy do the nasty. 11/10 guarantee i will *never* write that either.

there is nothin explicit anyway.

edit 03-04-21, added a bit more of direct est stultius content to make this more cohesive.

It's not what Billy thinks it's going to be. He'd run into her earlier in the day while she was on a jog and it felt like the timing was right, so he went for it. Timing is everything, sometimes. They made plans to meet up at Motel 6 and Billy brings the booze and some grass, and he's already a little buzzed before she shows up.

It starts out fine and she takes a toke all giddy smiles. Gigglingly confesses she hasn't smoked weed since her twenties, hand stroking over his tattoo. They pass a bottle of Jim Beam back and forth but he can tell she's getting cold feet, so he suggests they go down to the jacuzzi. It's after hours, but that makes it even better. They're already living on the wild side, wouldn't it be fun, isn't she so sick and tired of being constrained by the rules. She's gotta be, wouldn't be with

Billy if she wasn't. He can't get in the jacuzzi with his wounds but he sits on the edge, legs in the water. He loosens her up with well-placed wit and praise, soon enough she's laughing. She laughs so sexy and carefree, nearly in his lap. Then they're kissing and it's great right up until it isn't.

Until she's pulling away and staring at him as if he is some ruined thing, some horrible ruined thing seeping badness and ruining her too. She's suddenly stammering about mistakes and *my husband, my children, and my family*, lovely lashes furiously fluttering over eyes misting up. Billy doesn't know what went wrong, why it changed so fast. He had her heart in his hand, didn't he?

Karen gets up so he gets up too, grabs her wrist. He isn't going to hurt her, he just wants her to wait a second because what the hell, what changed? Why the fuck is she looking at him like that when they were having fun? Before he can even get a word out, she's driving her elbow forward, upward, freed from his grip and vehemently telling him *no, no, no, I can't*. Still staring at him like he's ruining her, she retreats, shaking her head from side to side.

"I shouldn't be here, I'm sorry, Billy, it's just wrong." She spins on her heel and scampers toward the door so fast she's almost running, gives a little yelp as she slips on the slick concrete.

Billy hurries to catch her but he's sort of pretty drunk, his help is kinda sloppy, kinda clumsy. And unwanted, apparently, Karen cringes the moment his hands touch her even though she was into it less than five minutes ago, her mouth sunburn hot on his. Neither of them can get their balance quick enough and they topple into the pool together.

Chlorine shoots up his nose and the next thing he knows, there's a fucking firestorm tearing through his torso.

Oh shit, oh fuck, Billy surfaces clenching his teeth against immediate agony. Karen surfaces some lengths away and swims toward the ladder. The edge is closer, Billy kicks toward it and plants his palms down on the concrete, hefts himself and fuck— fuck that hurts too, fuck everything —and clambers over the poolside.

Jesus Christ, his clothes are soaked, it went right through the dressings, it's chlorinated pool water against open meat and it burns like a motherfucker. He doesn't watch Karen leave but her second apology echoes through the air as the wet slap of her footsteps recedes.

Billy doesn't wait, wrestles his wet shirt off right there, rips the pads off, yanks out the sodden wadded ribbon gauze as fast as he can. It doesn't help much, the raw tissue's still searing and screaming. He grits his teeth so hard he swears he's gonna lose a filling, bears up and pulls himself to his feet.

He grabs his shirt, leaves the discarded dressings on the floor. This place has custodians, maids or whatever, somebody'll clean it up. He needs to get out of here.

He's okay. He's okay, it's fine. It's a long walk back to his room but he's fine. He checks out his wounds in the bathroom mirror, does his best to flush them out with plain tap water and doesn't make a sound even though it stings something ferocious. He's fine, he has a high tolerance. He's fine, he's— he's had worse, right? Broken bones and his guts spilling out. He doesn't actually recall any of the latter experience but he doesn't have to to know it hurt.

Billy guzzles away at the bottle, doesn't have anyone to share it with now, trusts it to do at least a little something for him. He had the foresight to bring a blister pack of ibuprofen, digs that out of his pocket and takes the twin tablets. He's okay. Dumfounded and confused, but okay.

Billy still doesn't understand what happened with Karen, how she went from laughing in his lap to staring at him like that.

And he. Doesn't like it.

He's not hurt, of course he's not hurt, Billy isn't a goddamn sap. She's sexy, she's fun, and he likes— well, liked —the way she was into his attention. Like he was giving her something precious and grand, feeding something she needed fed. They were going to fuck and it was was going to be a good night, a damn good night.

He missed out on a good night, that's all. He's not heartbroken, for fuck's sake. But the way she looked at him just...ugh, why should he care?

He shouldn't. It's not the first time Billy's ever made a lover upset. He upset a plethora of fucks back in California. Really burned that chick who used to roller-skate at the boardwalk, told her right to her face her mom gave better head, and meant it too. Fooled around with his old school's star running back for a few days, then flipped him the bird when he got gushy and reached for Billy's hand. Did some freaky shit with that goth girl who worked at the gas station and after the fact mocked her for looking like a vampire even though he'd really enjoyed the biting in bed.

He shouldn't care. Billy doesn't know why he feels like he cares, why that look just stopped him in his tracks and sank somewhere inside of him. Why he feels like he has sludge in his stomach. He shouldn't be this put out over a night gone sour, that's stupid, this is stupid.

He has a motel room, he shouldn't waste it. So Karen got weird and that was a bust, whatever. Billy can go cruising and pick up somebody else. It's Saturday night.

He hangs his shirt over the shower curtain rod so it can dry. He didn't bring any of the packing stuff for his wounds, didn't anticipate needing to, but whatever, one night of air can't hurt. Between the booze and the ibuprofen, the pain's already ebbing.

Billy decides he'll step out for a smoke and grab his keys, look for another lay. He's not too drunk to drive. He actually drives pretty good when he's buzzed up. Most of his speeding tickets, he's gotten sober.

Billy wakes up to a maid poking him with a broom, telling him he has to go because she needs to clean. He feels like he got run over by a truck. His head is killing him and his wounds are acting up like they haven't in days. Billy squints skeptically at her, then glances to the floor. Oh, there's his pants. Shiny condom wrapper. Just about empty bottle of Jim Beam on top the television set.

The maid announces that he has ten minutes to scram or else she's calling her manager. With that, she leaves the room and Billy peels off the duvet. He notices red in the sheets. Not a lot, just a few pinpricks stark in the white cotton.

It takes him a moment to work out that it's his blood. His wounds are uncovered and they look...oh...shit, he did something. There's dried blood crusted around the edges of the lower slash, fresher red glazed over the pink of the meat inside.

It's not exactly a reassuring sight. Billy gets up carefully, one hand braced on the mattress, opposite hovering over his middle, just in case...in case what, he doesn't know. If the blood starts flooding free.

It doesn't. His torso protests the movement and tiny trickles weep from the corners, tickling warm down his skin. It's a little gross, maybe, but Billy can deal. He's gonna go home and stuff them up again and he'll be good to go. It's a hassle more than anything, especially with the headache pounding inside his skull.

Ugh. His hangover's the size of Texas. Hopefully that means he ended up having a good night. He ponders on that as he gets himself dressed, tugs his jeans back over his hips with care, checks himself out in the mirror. He's got a couple hickeys on his neck, wracks his brain for a memory of who left them and comes up with nothing tangible.

His shirt is a little damp. Uncomfortable against his wounds but he can't exactly walk through the door shirtless. Susan would probably have a heart attack, she drained white getting a glimpse when they weren't all bloody. Max doesn't scare easy, but she's seen enough ugly shit, Billy thinks. Won't show her more if he doesn't have to. And Neil— Neil isn't there, of course. Isn't anywhere but the sewer.

Why the hell did Neil even pop into his head?

Whatever. Billy grabs the bottle of Jim Beam by the neck and downs the last swallow left in it. Hair of the dog. Makes sure he has his wallet before he shuffles out, searches for the Camaro in the parking lot.

It's hard to miss. It takes up two spaces. Billy treads over burnt tired tracks he must've left himself and slides into the driver's seat.

Driving home sucks. The sun is too bright and braking just hurts. He should get gas but he really, really needs to lie down, he thinks, stuff his weird mouth-hole-wounds up and sleep off the hangover. It can wait, he's just not in the mood.

He also isn't in the mood to play twenty questions with Susan but as soon as he's home, it's all of thirty seconds before she's trying to rope him into a round.

"Uhh, did you go swimming?"

"I don't know." He hopes she'll read his tone and lay off.

"What do you mean, you don't know?" Susan asks, eyes widening above her snack plate.

So much for laying off. What a stupid ass question. The answer is self-evident.

"Jesus. I'm an accomplice to your murderous axe rampage and we did drunk cooking together. That means something or other, Sue, I get it, but it definitely doesn't mean you can crawl up my ass about every single little thing."

What she did to Neil changes things. A lot of things. Maybe they can be open with each other in ways they couldn't before. Neither of them have to navigate the other with Neil in mind because there's no more Neil to navigate, and Billy acknowledges that. But he has no reason to tolerate her hovering. This much this fast is downright suffocating.

He's feeling sorta sick and sore as fuck, just the motion of opening in the fridge aggravates his wounds. Last thing he feels like dealing with is Susan getting in his shit.

"I wish, um...I wish you wouldn't call it a rampage." Something strange glints in her eye as she breaks a pretzel stick over her plate. Her expression goes vacant like it always did when Neil was in a mood, grousing at the dinner table, or ordering her around. Billy

believes he understands something but he doesn't care to ask, probably wouldn't even if he was feeling friendlier.

"So there's a deal to be made here. You quit crawling up my ass, and I'll quit calling it that." He takes a Gatorade figuring it might help perk him up, electrolytes and all that.

He goes to his room and slams the door in frustration, not as hard as he could but hard enough to hurt. Christ. It shouldn't be this bad. Braking for the goat was pretty painful but it wasn't like this, it didn't bleed.

He's bleeding. Billy feels the fresh blood even before he strips his shirt off to look. It isn't serious, isn't some horror movie scarlet waterfall. Just tiny trickles at the corners, glistening in the beds of raw tissue. Well, he's home now. He can take care of this.

Billy pops in a cassette and cranks the volume. Because it hurts and he tries not to let a sound slip past his teeth but a couple do anyway. The music covers his cries as he patches himself up and it's comforting just to have it blaring, solace to be found in the shredding of his eardrums.

He swallows a couple of Max's pills down with the Gatorade. She just left them on his dresser at some point, he didn't ask. And maybe it bugs him that this means she went into his room while he was out, but the offering is appreciated now. There shouldn't be blood anymore, Billy messed up somewhere...

No point in thinking about it. The damage is done. He doesn't care to think about why he slips out of his room either, grabs Neil's hideous blanket from the linen closet and smuggles it away before he can be noticed.

It's an ugly blanket but it's comfortable, worn cotton, soft batting. He just wants to get comfortable. Sleep off the hangover, sleep through the pain. Max's pills haven't kicked in yet.

Billy unfolds the thing, rolls his eyes at the proud, sharp lines of the eagle's profile. There's an embroidered tag at the bottom that reads, 'Home of the Free, because of the Brave.' Bull-fucking-shit.

Very brave, Neil. Bullying women, belittling everything different, and blowing up at anything new just because it's new. Maybe that's why his dad really moved them out to the Midwestern middle of nowhere, so he could just isolate them all in nothing but fields and hicks. So he could be the scariest thing there was, hide his head in the sand from the challenges of civilization in the city.

Bastard.

Billy curls himself up in faded red, white, and blue, inhales through his nose. Neil's scent is getting stale, scarcely discernible. Another week in the closet and he thinks he won't be able to pick it up at all.

Max's pills still haven't kicked in. Billy isn't a wimp. He's plenty familiar with pain, Neil made sure of that. But the tears in his flesh are pretty long, pretty deep, and he can't deny the shooting hot spikes when he moves the wrong way, the constant dull nag of discomfort even when he doesn't.

Neil felt this nineteen times. Neil felt this nineteen times fresh. Neil certainly died in pain. It must've been terrible, excruciating pain.

Billy balls the fabric of the blanket in his fists and cackles. It hurts and he doesn't give a flying fuck, laughs like a loon with the sheer satisfaction of knowing Neil's pain was worse. The last thing his father felt was this multiplied incredibly as he extinguished in a pond of his own blood and Billy revels in it, cackling until it brings tears to his eyes.

Billy naps intermittently. Wakes up to dressings uncomfortable damp. It throws him a bit when he sees the blood. He was just thinking it'd be more drainage, like, normal, nasty but not particularly perturbing drainage, if more than he's had to deal with as of late. Except he finds himself looking at more blood.

He changes the packing stuff out anyway, lies back down, idly chews at his nails. It's fine. It's fine, wherever he put the paper, it said some some blood was normal...only that was like, over a week ago and there hasn't been any recent blood. And then there was also the part

at the bottom that said to call if the bleeding was excessive...but what's the measure of excessive, anyway?

Excessive bleeding brings to mind the stains that took Neil's place. The residue in the carpet, the streaks on the wall. That was excessive, splotted gauze and some crusty smears on Billy's skin aren't that at all. He's okay, he just overdid it, maybe. He overdid it going at Neil's truck too and he was mostly fine after that, so it shouldn't be different this time.

Billy knows it's dinnertime when the scent of chicken broth wafts in from under the door. Susan's reheating drunk gizzard soup on the stove. He expects her to come knocking and finds himself grateful when it doesn't happen. She finally got the message. Good.

He's bored of laying around but he isn't really hungry and much as he doesn't like being sluggish, he's starting to feel a little wary of exacerbating whatever he already exacerbated. Maybe it's Max's pills but he doesn't really have much energy, either. He has enough to be bored, but not really enough to relieve the boredom. Decides to smoke a cigarette and go through his closet.

Billy settles with the familiar smolder in his throat, flips through clothes Neil bought him. Most of it is ugly shit. Preppy polos, fucking khakis. The way Neil wanted him to dress.

Now and then if he was feeling generous or something good happened, he'd buy Billy something he actually liked. Got him a nice pair of black jeans already ripped when he had the good fortune to turn in a winning scratch-off ticket. Got him a stonewashed denim vest when he had a decent Christmas bonus two years back.

Billy's definitely gonna toss the ugly shit. Hasn't decided what to do with the few articles of gifted clothing he doesn't mind wearing. He has complicated feelings attached to those and...well, maybe that means he should toss them too. He already has more complicated feelings than he knows what to do with, why not eliminate the excess. Good moments with Neil were rare and fraught, and he doesn't want to give those memories priority. Doesn't want to go down the road of delusion, doesn't want to find himself somewhere stupid like missing him or maybe even...mad at Susan? Guilty for

giving her cover?

No, no, he never could ever be that delusional. Neil lashed out at Max. Touching Max was always off the table. Billy's still pissed off about it, silently roaring with rage even though it'll never happen again. It never should've happened at all. If he could resurrect Neil he would, just to kill him again.

Besides, his stepmom isn't some cold, calculating villainess. She was Neil's prized pooch and she did what pooches do when they're trained not to growl, backed all the way into that corner with nowhere else to move. Pressed that far back, those pooches don't dare bite the hand. They go straight for the throat. That's why the pound always puts them down, why Billy has to protect Susan even when she's driving him bonkers crawling up his ass, or popping outta the walls and giving him the heebie-jeebies.

Yeah, he needs to get rid of the clothes. All the clothes. Anything from Neil is more trouble than it's worth. Billy wants to be done with him, wants to banish all that came from him.

He thinks he does anyway. He still has that stupid blanket on his bed. But that's going too, he swears it is. He doesn't want it. Just because it's not garbage yet doesn't mean it won't be.

He finds his old Little League uniform at the very back of his closet. Now that, that's going in the fucking fireplace. Billy'll pour some kerosene on it just to watch it blaze.

He rips stuff down from the hangers through a few cigarettes and another hit off his joint. Max's pills have long worn off by the time his dressings soak again. Billy's wary when he discards them, swallowing against the unwelcome sight of more blood.

Shit. It just. It doesn't seem right. He doesn't want to have to bother with it, but it just...doesn't seem right. It seems worse. He...feels worse.

Concern needles at Billy as he packs his wounds up for the third time today, hasn't needed to do it more than once daily since the first day or so after their dehiscence. His hands are a little bit shaky and as

much as he'd prefer not to acknowledge it, he's feeling kind of weak — but that's, well, he probably just needs to eat. He also needs to get more gauze. That was the last of the roll.

Goddamnit. He's so low on gas. Maybe Billy could borrow Susan's car...only driving doesn't...damn, he just. Really doesn't feel like driving. It wasn't a pleasant experience earlier. It was actually pretty shitty and he's still bleeding. He's kind of nervous about making things worse than he evidently already did.

So Billy bites the bullet and trudges out to the living room, bugs Susan for a ride only to discover it's too late to go anyway. He lost a few hours in his own head. And he'd rather stick his dick in a cactus than tell her he's bleeding because she's just gonna flip out, but she's already anxious asking for an explanation. For some reason or another, he winds up being honest anyway.

Susan takes it better than he thought she would, all things considered, but still looks pretty alarmed, has those deer-in-headlights eyes. "Okay. Maybe we should pay a visit to Urgent Care, hm? They're open until ten."

Billy wants to decline. He's been poked and prodded at enough as of late. He's in pain and he doesn't particularly care to be around other people when he's in pain, he'd rather hole himself up and hide out, handle it himself. He's embarrassed to come to her at all but...but he's also apprehensive at this point, because he probably shouldn't be bleeding anymore, and he doesn't know what he's gonna do if a few hours from now, his wounds are still leaking and he doesn't have anything left to stuff in them.

"Might not be a bad idea," he sighs out, defeat tasting like dirt on his tongue.

The car ride is awkward and uncomfortable. Susan's smart enough not to talk at him too much, though she does ask what he did. And he's honest about that too, he's pretty sure he had sex. Doesn't think there would've been a condom wrapper in the motel room if he wasn't screwing. It's all Billy can think of that was maybe too hard on his wounds. Sure, he partied Friday night too, but beer pong was height of that night's athleticism and he doesn't recall bleeding when

he helped her cook soup.

Well...he supposes maybe he could've done something when he tried to catch Karen, tumbled into the pool. The water hurt like hell. But the thing is, he just— he doesn't really want to think about that, doesn't want to think about the way she looked at him and how it all went bad —no, he doesn't want to think about that at all. Whole thing was bullshit. Nobody needs to know about that, especially not freaking Susan.

Billy's given a shot of painkiller almost as soon as they take him back. It doesn't kick in right away, it's more poking and prodding, and stupid ass questions he strains against answering sarcastically. He's irritated and this whole thing is irritating, he just wants to know he isn't slowly bleeding to death. Wants to be sure that whatever he tore, he didn't tear it so deep his insides are gonna slide out again.

But it's none of that. There's some inflammation, but nothing to indicate infection, he just ripped through healing tissue too new, not strong enough to handle whatever he put it through. Which must've been sex, he swears for the second time tonight, and sure enough, no, he shouldn't be screwing anybody or lifting anything over ten pounds, or engaging in any kind of vigorous exercise for at least a couple weeks. And Billy knows that shit already, he just...finds it hard to stay still for too long.

He gets patched up again and lectured simultaneously. It's all blah, blah, blah. If he wants to heal fast he should get some rest, try out iron supplements and vitamin C, stay hydrated, eat leafy greens and avoid smoking. Feels like fucking ninth grade health class and Billy's starting to regret coming here at all, when the painkiller finally kicks in.

Whew. That's a mood booster. Suddenly painless, he's feeling pretty good and nods along with the lectures. Takes the slip that grants him access to even more painkillers with a smile and polite bow of the head. He's actually rather chipper when he puts his shirt back on and for the first time in a week, doesn't even feel a twinge.

"What's the verdict?" Susan asks, all fidgety like she's on the edge of

a nervous breakdown.

It would be so easy to give her a heart attack. Tell her hey, it's too late, he's fucking septic. But Billy's feeling too good to be that mean so he teases Susan a little more gently.

"Probably fucked too hard. No more humping till the holes close, gotta stick to hand and mouth stuff."

He can't help smirking at the way her face goes cherry red. If Max weren't proof of the contrary, Billy would think Susan was a virgin. Any kind of dirty talk downright horrifies her, makes her eyes go all big.

"Why?" she asks, cheeks still flaring.

"The face you make when you hear anything less than PG is priceless." And it really is.

That good feeling sticks with Billy for a bit, has his head nice and light like candy floss. He's more alert out from underneath the pain. But when they pass the putt-putt course on the way home, his mind slips somewhere else and he blurts a question without really meaning to.

"You get rid of Neil's golf clubs yet?"

"No. Do you want them?"

"Pfft," Billy huffs and jerks his head. "I look like I play golf to you?"

Susan doesn't reply. Maybe her knuckles tighten on the steering wheel.

"I was just wondering, I guess..." Billy tries not to think about getting beat with a driver club in their old kitchen, punishment for detention he got after setting off a firecracker in class. He thinks about it anyway. Remember bruises like plums up and down his legs that throbbed for awhile and took forever to fade.

"I did throw out his medals," Susan informs him unbidden.

"You threw them out, like, in the garbage?" Billy balks in surprise.

"Yes."

"Man, those were his pride and joy." He blows out a low whistle.

"I know. I hope you're not upset."

"Hell no. Fuck Neil, fuck his medals." Billy fiddles with the latch of the glove compartment restlessly. Of course he doesn't give a shit. He just thinks maybe she could've sold them or something. Pawned them off. But it's whatever, he definitely wasn't keen on holding onto them. "I don't want any of his shit."

"But if you do, it's okay, Billy. If you change your mind, it's okay."

"I'm not gonna change my mind, seriously, Neil's shit belongs in the garbage. Fuck, Neil belonged in the garbage...he was trash but he was what I had, y'know?" he adds quietly, because it's true. Neil wasn't the father he should've been, but he was Billy's nonetheless and try as he might, he can't quite stop thinking about him yet.

"I know."

Billy wonders if just maybe she does. Susan doesn't talk much about her parents. The most he ever heard about them was what she slurred wasted the other night. He isn't sure what she meant by corn kernels, but he knew the rest of it. Doesn't really paint a pretty picture.

But he doesn't ask, doesn't think he'll ever actually ask.

Max is out of her room when they get home, armed with the motherfucking paddleball again. She's frowning worriedly and Billy ruffles her hair instead of breaking the board in half, musses it all up until she's bristled like an angry kitten and teases her to put her worries at ease.

She scowls and bats at him until he backs off. Max usually doesn't worry about him so openly. Billy knows she'd worry about him when she was around to catch Neil's discipline, when she got old enough to realize which missteps would invoke it and watched him take them

anyway. But she didn't vocalize her worries much, Billy typically snapped at her when she dare to.

Now no more Neil means Max can ask without adding fuel to the fire. And, well, Billy supposes she's bound to be fretful considering what she saw. She's still freaked out about the whole thing, he thinks. Max has been homebound a lot since that night, when before she was out with her weird nerd friends at any given opportunity. Could be the broken collarbone holding her back too, there's probably a lot she can't participate in.

Billy opens his window, finishes off his roach and exhales it into the night air as he decompresses. He didn't do much today but he's pretty worn out. Maybe it's from his injuries, maybe it's just a mental thing.

There's a knock at his door. Billy could ignore it, pretend to be asleep already. He answers it instead.

Susan's in her pajamas, fingers tented. "Max and I are camping out in the living room tonight."

"Kay." Billy doesn't see what that has to do with him.

"Billy, did you, um, b-bleed on your sheets?" Susan asks. "Because I was, um, thinking if you did, I could put on clean ones before I turn in."

Billy looks her over. Isn't sure if it's a guilt thing or not. Can't decide if he's annoyed by her or not.

Eh, nah, painkiller still has him feeling pretty good. Too good to be annoyed over stupid shit. If she wants to give him clean sheets, why the hell not. Maybe he'll get a little something to eat while she's doing that. Didn't have much of an appetite earlier, sore and kind of anxious, himself. Now that he's not, it's easier to acknowledge that he was.

"Sure, Susan, knock yourself out."

She smiles a little as she steps aside, a delicate curl of the lips. Billy shuffles past without a word, heads to the kitchen. Microwaves himself a bowl of gizzard soup that turned out way better than he

would've thought, considering how smashed Susan was and how he'd never cooked it before.

He eats it in the living room, on the tray he'd snorted his coke off of, idly watching Max above the bowl as she arranges pillows on Neil's reclined armchair.

"Sleeping there tonight?"

"Uh-huh."

"Not that comfortable, cushion's shaped like my dad's ass."

"I noticed." Her nose crinkles. "It's all frayed too. I'll make it work for tonight, but we need a new chair."

Billy slurps his next spoonful, gets a bit of broth splashed in his mustache. "Mhm."

"Geez, you're messy, you eat like a pig."

"Like you're any better."

"Hey, I have an excuse." Max pointedly lifts her brows and waves the hand poking out of her sling.

She climbs into the chair and gets herself adjusted, pulling up her Pac-Man blanket. Billy finishes his meal and puts his bowl in the sink. He'd forgotten he'd taken Neil's blanket from the closet and only remembers when he returns to his room and sees Susan neatly spread it on the bed, smoothing the wrinkles with her hands.

"I'm not keeping it," he announces, suddenly defensive.

Susan glances to him, lips parting.

"I'm not," he insists even though she doesn't speak otherwise. "It's stupid, I'm throwing it out."

"Okay..." Susan straightens up. "Are you throwing it out tonight?"

Billy hates how fast the lump rises in his throat. He feels shame and

shakes his head anyway.

Susan glides his way, almost reaches out. Billy isn't sure what makes her withdraw but she does, tenting her fingers once again.

"Thank you," she murmurs.

"For what?"

"Letting me take you to the clinic. I could tell you weren't exactly ecstatic about the idea, but it was reassuring for me. Just to, ah, cover our bases."

To make sure her second killing wasn't just delayed, more like. It's a nasty thought. It's the kind of thing Billy might've snapped at her a couple days ago just to watch her flinch. Because he's always had the power to make Susan flinch, she folds so easy. Now she's even more completely at his mercy, his literal birthday is the code to all the evidence that could be her undoing if he wanted it to be.

But he doesn't want that at all. He just rubs absently at the inside of his elbow, exhales through his nose.

"I think Max is waiting for you."

Susan actually does touch his shoulder on her way out, brush of her hand as brief as butterfly wings. Billy doesn't hate it. She shuts the door behind her and he curls up in clean linens.

Author's Note:

now to get back to priority bs, fucked up femslash feb was a bust but abcs of death will be posted this month, axe throwing will be the inevitable conclusion of this series, and the 20k+ resurrection will prolly be the last thing i post before returning to the realm of slasher/gorror from whence i crawled.